Existential Crises in Modern Adolescence: The Impact of Global Suffering and the Search for Meaning

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In today's digital world, teenagers are more connected to global events than ever before. They are constantly exposed to distant suffering, such as wars, environmental destruction, and social injustice, through social media and the internet. While this heightened awareness fosters empathy and global consciousness, it also leaves many teenagers feeling overwhelmed, powerless, and detached from meaningful action. These feelings can lead to existential crises characterized by anxiety, depression, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Traditional frameworks that once provided teenagers with a sense of purpose—family, religion, and community—are increasingly fragmented, making it difficult for them to navigate life's uncertainties. However, through the lens of existential psychology, particularly the work of Viktor Frankl and Rollo May, we explore how teenagers can overcome these existential challenges by embracing their freedom to create meaning, even in a chaotic world. This paper examines the psychological implications of global suffering, the role of technology in amplifying feelings of isolation, and practical strategies for fostering purpose and resilience among adolescents.

Keywords: existential crisis, adolescence, global suffering, existential psychology, meaning, depression, anxiety, moral disengagement, social media, existential vacuum, alienation, Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, mental health, purpose, resilience.
39 pages.

1. Introduction

Background:

Existential psychology, developed largely through the works of Viktor Frankl and Rollo May, focuses on the fundamental human drive to find meaning in life, particularly when confronted with suffering, chaos, and uncertainty. Both thinkers were deeply influenced by the existentialist philosophical tradition, which posits that humans are not only capable of creating their own meaning but must do so in a world that often appears indifferent or even hostile to their existence. The question of how to live authentically and purposefully in the face of suffering and uncertainty lies at the heart of existential psychology.

Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, developed his theory of *logotherapy* based on his experiences in Nazi concentration camps. He observed that those who found meaning in their suffering—whether through religious faith, personal relationships, or a sense of purpose—were better able to endure the hardships they faced. Frankl introduced the concept of the existential vacuum, a pervasive sense of emptiness or lack of meaning that arises when people fail to engage with life's deeper questions. In a modern context, this vacuum can manifest in feelings of depression, anxiety, and alienation, especially when individuals feel disconnected from meaningful action or purpose.

Rollo May, another major figure in existential psychology, emphasized the importance of confronting existential dread—the anxiety that arises when individuals confront life's inherent uncertainties and limitations. May argued that much of modern psychological distress stems from people's failure to face this dread and take responsibility for their freedom to create meaning in a seemingly chaotic and indifferent world. He highlighted the importance of authenticity, courage, and the individual's struggle to live a meaningful life in a society often driven by superficial values.

In today's fast-paced, globalized society, where traditional sources of meaning such as community, religion, and family bonds have weakened, the existential vacuum is more relevant than ever. People, especially teenagers, are bombarded with information about global suffering—wars, poverty, environmental destruction—through media and technology. This constant exposure, coupled with a feeling of powerlessness to make meaningful change, contributes to a

pervasive sense of hopelessness. For teenagers, who are in a critical developmental stage of exploring their identity and purpose, this vacuum can be particularly harmful.

Problem Statement:

Teenagers today are growing up in a world that is increasingly connected through technology, offering them access to real-time information about the suffering and injustices occurring globally. While they are more aware of distant crises than previous generations, this awareness often comes without the tools or opportunities to take meaningful action. The combination of heightened exposure to global suffering and a perceived inability to help or effect change creates a deep sense of powerlessness.

This can lead to an existential crisis as teenagers struggle to reconcile their desire for purpose with the overwhelming realities of the world around them. As a result, many young people experience rising levels of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress. Studies have shown that teenagers are increasingly reporting feelings of hopelessness, often citing concerns about global issues, such as climate change, war, and social injustice, while feeling they have little power to influence these matters.

The psychological burden of constant awareness without action mirrors the existential vacuum described by Frankl, where the lack of engagement in meaningful pursuits leads to feelings of emptiness. Similarly, May's concept of existential dread highlights the anxiety that arises when individuals are faced with the uncertainties of life but lack the courage or means to take responsibility for creating their own meaning. For teenagers, who are just beginning to form their personal values and life goals, this detachment from meaningful action can be especially damaging.

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to explore how modern societal detachment from meaningful action in response to global suffering affects teenagers, leading to psychological distress. By examining the principles of existential psychology, particularly the works of Viktor Frankl and Rollo May, we aim to provide a

framework for understanding the psychological impact of global awareness and powerlessness in young people.

We will argue that the existential vacuum, as described by Frankl, and the existential dread, as articulated by May, are key factors in understanding the rise of depression and anxiety among teenagers today. Additionally, we will explore how existential psychology can offer potential solutions by encouraging teenagers to find and create meaning in their lives, even when faced with overwhelming global challenges.

This paper will also examine how alienation, moral disengagement, and social media's role in shaping teenagers' awareness of global suffering further contribute to their psychological struggles. We will discuss the importance of authenticity, freedom, and responsibility in helping teenagers navigate the existential challenges of modern life. Ultimately, we will argue that by adopting strategies rooted in existential psychology, teenagers can overcome the feelings of powerlessness and isolation that come from constant exposure to global suffering, and instead, find meaningful ways to engage with the world around them.

2. Existential Psychology and the Human Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, a major pillar of existential psychology, is built around the idea that the primary motivation in human life is the search for meaning. Unlike Sigmund Freud's focus on the will to pleasure or Alfred Adler's emphasis on the will to power, Frankl identified the "will to meaning" as the driving force behind human existence. Frankl developed this philosophy during his time in Nazi concentration camps, where he observed that those who found meaning in their suffering were more likely to survive the horrific conditions, both physically and psychologically.

One of the central concepts in Frankl's theory is the existential vacuum, which he described as a pervasive sense of emptiness and meaninglessness that arises when individuals lack a sense of purpose or direction in their lives. In a world where traditional sources of meaning—religion, family, and community—are

increasingly fragmented or absent, many people, especially teenagers, find themselves adrift in an existential vacuum. This state of meaninglessness can manifest in various ways, including boredom, apathy, depression, and anxiety. Frankl argued that this existential vacuum is particularly prevalent in modern society, where people are often overwhelmed by information and external pressures but disconnected from deeper, personal sources of meaning.

Frankl's concept of the will to meaning suggests that human beings have an intrinsic desire to find purpose, even in the face of suffering or adversity. However, when this will is frustrated—when individuals are unable to find or create meaning in their lives—the result is often psychological distress. For teenagers, who are in the critical developmental phase of forming their identities and understanding their place in the world, the inability to find personal meaning can be particularly harmful. This is exacerbated by their heightened exposure to global suffering through media and technology, where they see the harsh realities of war, poverty, and environmental degradation but often feel powerless to take meaningful action.

In logotherapy, Frankl posits that meaning can be found in three primary ways:

1. Through work or deeds: Engaging in meaningful activities or contributing to something larger than oneself.
2. Through experiences or relationships: Finding meaning in love, beauty, nature, and human connections.
3. Through suffering: Transforming personal suffering into an opportunity for growth by adopting a positive attitude toward unavoidable hardships.

Teenagers who are exposed to global suffering without the means to take meaningful action may struggle to find purpose in these areas, leading to feelings of depression and anxiety. Frankl's approach suggests that even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, individuals can choose how they respond to their circumstances and, in doing so, can find meaning. For teenagers, this means finding purpose in small, personal acts of kindness, creativity, or growth, even when they cannot address the world's larger problems directly.

Rollo May’s Existential Dread

Rollo May, another prominent figure in existential psychology, explored the concept of existential dread and how it affects the human experience. May believed that anxiety is an inevitable part of life because of the inherent uncertainties, limitations, and suffering we face as human beings. He distinguished between normal anxiety and neurotic anxiety:

- Normal anxiety is a natural and healthy response to the challenges and uncertainties of life. It is a motivating force that pushes individuals to take responsibility for their choices and to confront life's difficulties with courage.
- Neurotic anxiety, on the other hand, arises when individuals are overwhelmed by fear or avoidance, leading to paralysis, indecision, and feelings of powerlessness. Neurotic anxiety often stems from an inability or unwillingness to face life's uncertainties and to take responsibility for finding meaning in the midst of these challenges.

In the modern world, especially for teenagers, existential dread often takes the form of neurotic anxiety. Teenagers are constantly exposed to global crises, such as climate change, war, and economic inequality, through social media and news outlets. While this heightened awareness can foster a sense of empathy and global consciousness, it can also create a profound sense of helplessness. Teenagers may feel powerless to change these overwhelming issues, leading to neurotic anxiety, which manifests as depression, hopelessness, or emotional withdrawal.

May argued that existential dread is not inherently negative; rather, it is a natural response to the human condition. The key is to confront this dread courageously and authentically, taking responsibility for one’s own life and choices, even in the face of overwhelming global challenges. For teenagers, this means accepting the reality that they cannot solve all the world’s problems but can still find meaning and purpose in their personal lives. This can be achieved by focusing on what is within their control—building meaningful relationships, engaging in creative expression, or contributing to their communities in small but significant ways.

May emphasized that the root of neurotic anxiety is often a failure to take responsibility for one's own freedom. In the context of modern teenagers, this could mean feeling trapped by external pressures, such as societal expectations or global crises, without recognizing their ability to make choices within those constraints. May's existential psychology encourages individuals to embrace their freedom to choose, even in difficult circumstances, and to find authentic ways to create meaning in their lives.

For teenagers who are aware of distant suffering and feel powerless to help, this may involve reframing their understanding of responsibility. Instead of focusing on their inability to solve global crises, they can focus on smaller, actionable steps that give them a sense of control and purpose. This could be volunteering in their local community, participating in activism, or simply engaging in personal growth and self-care. By taking responsibility for their own actions, teenagers can reduce their neurotic anxiety and find meaning in the world, even when it seems chaotic or unjust.

The Intersection of Frankl and May's Theories

Both Frankl and May highlight the importance of confronting suffering, anxiety, and uncertainty with a sense of responsibility and purpose. For Frankl, meaning can be found in the response to suffering, while May focuses on the courage required to face existential dread. In the context of modern teenagers, who are often confronted with the overwhelming realities of global suffering, both approaches offer valuable insights.

Frankl's emphasis on finding meaning even in difficult circumstances provides a path for teenagers to transform their feelings of powerlessness into purposeful action. Meanwhile, May's focus on accepting and confronting existential anxiety encourages teenagers to embrace their freedom to choose how they respond to the uncertainties and challenges they face. Together, these existential psychologists provide a framework for understanding and addressing the psychological distress that arises from the combination of heightened global awareness and the struggle to find meaning in the modern world.

3. The Role of Global Suffering in Modern Adolescence

Teenagers' Exposure to Global Crises

In the digital age, teenagers are exposed to more information about global suffering than any previous generation. With the rise of the internet, social media platforms, and 24-hour news cycles, young people have unprecedented access to real-time updates about wars, humanitarian crises, environmental disasters, and social injustices happening around the world. This heightened awareness is a double-edged sword: while it fosters a sense of global connectedness and empathy, it also inundates teenagers with a constant stream of distressing information.

Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide an unfiltered look at global crises. Teenagers regularly encounter images and videos of conflict zones, refugee camps, climate catastrophes, and marginalized communities suffering from systemic inequality. For many young people, this exposure to global suffering is not limited to traditional news outlets but is woven into their everyday online interactions, where they come across these issues in posts shared by friends, influencers, or activists. Unlike previous generations, who may have only learned about distant crises through curated media, today's teenagers are bombarded with both professional and user-generated content that paints a visceral picture of the world's suffering.

This exposure can have both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, teenagers often develop a sense of empathy and social consciousness by becoming more aware of global issues. They are more likely to engage in conversations about climate change, racial inequality, and humanitarian causes. However, the sheer volume of information and the often unfiltered nature of social media can lead to emotional overload. Without adequate support or the ability to process this information effectively, teenagers may feel overwhelmed by the scale of suffering they witness.

Moreover, the internet and social media have blurred the lines between personal and global events. Teenagers today live in a world where distant suffering feels close. A war halfway around the globe can feel just as immediate and real as a local tragedy, thanks to the immersive nature of media. This hyper-awareness of

global crises makes it harder for teenagers to create emotional distance from the suffering they see, which can amplify feelings of distress, sadness, and anxiety.

Powerlessness and Alienation

One of the most significant psychological effects of teenagers' exposure to global crises is the profound sense of powerlessness it can generate. While teenagers are increasingly aware of the world's problems, they often feel that they lack the resources, influence, or authority to make any meaningful impact. This can create a deep sense of helplessness, as they watch from afar, unable to stop wars, prevent natural disasters, or solve social injustices. The gap between awareness and action becomes a breeding ground for existential despair.

For teenagers, this feeling of powerlessness is compounded by their developmental stage. Adolescence is a time when individuals are forming their identities, exploring their values, and seeking to understand their role in the world. It is a period of life where the desire to contribute to society and create change is especially strong. However, when faced with issues like climate change, human rights abuses, and global poverty—issues that require systemic and large-scale solutions—teenagers may feel alienated from the possibility of making any real difference.

This sense of alienation is not just a result of their inability to take direct action but also a symptom of the detachment they may feel from societal institutions and systems. Many teenagers perceive the world as controlled by powerful political, corporate, or economic forces that are beyond their influence. They may view governments, international organizations, and corporations as distant entities that perpetuate the very suffering they want to alleviate. As a result, they feel disconnected from the very systems that could theoretically offer solutions, further exacerbating their feelings of isolation.

In existential psychology, alienation refers to the experience of being cut off from one's authentic self, from others, or from the broader society. For teenagers, witnessing global crises without being able to meaningfully engage in addressing them can lead to a form of existential alienation. This manifests as a disconnection from the sense of agency or purpose that is critical to psychological well-being. Alienation, in this context, involves not only feeling separate from the

larger world but also questioning the meaningfulness of one's own life in relation to that world.

Moreover, this powerlessness can erode teenagers' sense of self-efficacy, the belief in their ability to influence the world around them. Repeated exposure to crises without corresponding action can create a narrative of hopelessness, where teenagers internalize the idea that no matter what they do, the problems of the world are insurmountable. This leads to emotional numbing, a psychological defense mechanism where individuals suppress their feelings in response to overwhelming stress or anxiety. While this numbing protects against the immediate pain of feeling helpless, it also contributes to long-term feelings of disconnection and detachment, both from their inner lives and from others.

The result is a dangerous cycle: the more teenagers are exposed to global suffering without opportunities for meaningful action, the more they feel alienated and powerless. The more powerless they feel, the less likely they are to seek out ways to engage, which perpetuates the sense of helplessness and fuels existential despair. This cycle can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety, as teenagers struggle to reconcile their awareness of global suffering with their perceived inability to affect change.

Existential Alienation and Isolation

This psychological state of existential alienation is further deepened by the isolation many teenagers feel in their personal lives. While they are hyperconnected digitally, they may experience a lack of genuine social support or engagement in the real world. This digital hyperconnectivity often leads to what psychologists term solitude in the crowd—a state in which individuals are constantly connected to others through screens but are simultaneously isolated in terms of meaningful, face-to-face human interaction.

The alienation that stems from global awareness, combined with the disconnection experienced in personal relationships, can lead to a profound sense of existential isolation. Teenagers may feel that they are alone in grappling with these overwhelming global issues, even though they know that millions of others are witnessing the same crises. This isolation is not merely physical or social but existential: it is the feeling of being disconnected from the deeper purpose or meaning in life.

Existential alienation, as described by existential psychologists like Rollo May, occurs when individuals are unable to find meaning or connection in the world around them. For teenagers, this alienation is amplified by their heightened awareness of suffering combined with the inability to act. The result is an emotional and psychological disconnect, where the desire to contribute to the world clashes with the perception of powerlessness. This leads to a sense of disorientation, where teenagers struggle to find their place in a world that seems both overwhelming and indifferent.

In conclusion, the role of global suffering in modern adolescence is deeply intertwined with feelings of powerlessness and existential alienation. Teenagers today are more aware of the world's problems than ever before, yet their inability to address these issues meaningfully creates a psychological burden. This burden manifests as a sense of disconnection—from society, from others, and from their own sense of purpose—leading to depression, anxiety, and existential despair. To address these psychological challenges, it is crucial to explore how teenagers can be empowered to find meaning in their lives, even in the face of overwhelming global crises.

4. The Existential Vacuum: Depression and Anxiety in Teens

The Rise of Depression and Anxiety

In recent decades, there has been a notable increase in rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers. Studies consistently show that mental health issues, including depressive disorders and anxiety disorders, are rising among young people worldwide. One of the major factors contributing to this surge is the growing sense of disengagement from meaningful action that many teenagers experience. As they are increasingly exposed to global crises—wars, environmental disasters, social injustices, and political conflicts—they often feel powerless to address or influence these issues. This feeling of powerlessness, combined with a lack of clear avenues for meaningful engagement, creates fertile ground for psychological distress.

Modern society is characterized by rapid technological advances, increased connectivity, and access to global information. However, the same tools that

allow teenagers to witness global suffering also leave them without the personal agency or support systems to process these realities. Social media, for example, provides a constant stream of updates on global crises but offers few resources to translate this awareness into tangible action. Teenagers find themselves in a position where they can see the world's problems but are unable to intervene in meaningful ways. This lack of agency can lead to a growing sense of despair and disillusionment, contributing to the rise of depression and anxiety.

Furthermore, societal values have shifted toward a focus on individual achievement, success, and materialism, which often leaves little room for the pursuit of meaningful or purpose-driven action. Many teenagers are driven by external pressures to excel academically, socially, or in extracurricular activities, yet these pursuits often feel disconnected from deeper values or a broader sense of purpose. As a result, they are left feeling disconnected from their own personal fulfillment, leading to a state of existential discontent.

A study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that teenagers today report higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to previous generations, with much of this stress linked to issues they perceive as beyond their control, such as climate change, political instability, and societal inequalities. When combined with the pressures of social comparison, academic achievement, and peer relationships, this sense of powerlessness exacerbates feelings of anxiety. The rise of social media also plays a significant role, as teenagers are bombarded with images of suffering but lack constructive outlets for processing or responding to this information. As a result, the modern teenager experiences a psychological environment that fosters emotional distress rather than resilience.

Frankl's Existential Vacuum

Viktor Frankl's concept of the existential vacuum provides a valuable framework for understanding the rise of depression and anxiety in modern teenagers. The existential vacuum refers to a state of meaninglessness and emptiness that arises when individuals lack purpose or are disconnected from activities and values that give their lives meaning. Frankl argued that this sense of emptiness is prevalent in modern society, where traditional sources of meaning—such as religious faith, community, and family structures—have weakened or been replaced by more superficial pursuits.

For teenagers, the existential vacuum manifests as a profound detachment from sources of meaning in their personal and collective lives. Adolescence is a time of identity formation, where young people begin to ask existential questions about who they are, what they value, and what their role in the world should be. In the past, these questions were often answered through stable frameworks such as religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and family expectations. However, in contemporary society, these traditional structures have eroded, leaving teenagers with few clear paths to finding authentic meaning.

Frankl emphasized that when individuals fail to find meaning in their lives, they often turn to compensatory behaviors such as hedonism, materialism, or distraction to fill the void. These behaviors may offer temporary relief but ultimately deepen the sense of emptiness. For teenagers, this might manifest as an overreliance on social media, substance use, or a preoccupation with external validation through academic or social success. While these activities may provide short-term pleasure or distraction, they do not offer the deeper, long-lasting sense of fulfillment that comes from pursuing meaningful goals.

The existential vacuum is particularly relevant to the modern teenager's experience of global suffering. As teenagers are exposed to the realities of war, poverty, and environmental destruction through the internet and social media, they may become acutely aware of the world's suffering but feel detached from any meaningful way to address it. This detachment contributes to a sense of meaninglessness, as teenagers struggle to reconcile their desire for purpose with their inability to engage in purpose-driven action.

Frankl believed that meaning could be found even in the face of suffering, provided that individuals are able to transform their suffering into an opportunity for growth or contribution. However, for modern teenagers, this transformation is often blocked by their perceived powerlessness. Without the ability to take action, their awareness of global suffering only serves to deepen their sense of helplessness and alienation. They may feel trapped in a world where suffering is omnipresent but their capacity to influence it is limited, leading to existential despair.

Moreover, Frankl's idea of the will to meaning highlights the fundamental human drive to seek purpose in life. When this drive is thwarted—when teenagers are

unable to find meaning in their personal lives or in the broader world—they experience psychological distress. This lack of meaning leads to feelings of anxiety, depression, and emptiness. In this context, the existential vacuum becomes a metaphor for the modern teenager's experience of disconnection from the sources of meaning that could help them navigate the challenges of adolescence.

For teenagers, the global suffering they witness serves as a constant reminder of the world's unjust and chaotic nature, making it difficult to find personal meaning in a world that seems beyond repair. Frankl would argue that the key to overcoming the existential vacuum is to actively engage in the search for meaning, even in the face of adversity. However, for many teenagers, the modern world offers few constructive outlets for this search, leaving them feeling lost and overwhelmed.

In addition to global suffering, the pressures of consumerism and individualism in modern society often exacerbate the existential vacuum. Teenagers are encouraged to focus on personal achievement, success, and material wealth as measures of fulfillment. Yet, these pursuits frequently fail to provide the deep sense of purpose that comes from engaging in meaningful relationships, altruistic activities, or spiritual growth. As a result, many teenagers find themselves chasing external validation while feeling increasingly disconnected from their inner sense of purpose, deepening their depression and anxiety.

Conclusion

The rise of depression and anxiety among teenagers is closely linked to the phenomenon of the existential vacuum, as described by Viktor Frankl. In a world where teenagers are more aware than ever of global suffering but often feel powerless to address it, they experience a profound sense of disconnection from sources of meaning. This detachment from meaningful engagement with the world contributes to the development of emotional distress, particularly in the form of depression and anxiety. The modern teenager's experience of global suffering serves as both a source of existential crisis and a barrier to finding purpose and fulfillment.

To address this existential vacuum, it is crucial to create opportunities for teenagers to engage in meaningful activities that allow them to connect with their

values and contribute to the world in positive ways. Whether through community service, creative expression, or environmental activism, finding small yet significant ways to make a difference can help alleviate the sense of powerlessness and alienation that contributes to the rise of depression and anxiety in today's youth.

5. Moral Disengagement and the Collective Unconscious

Albert Bandura's Moral Disengagement

Albert Bandura, a prominent social psychologist, developed the theory of moral disengagement to explain how individuals and societies rationalize and justify harmful or immoral behavior. According to Bandura, people do not inherently act against their moral values; instead, they use various cognitive mechanisms to disengage from their moral standards, allowing them to behave in ways that would otherwise cause guilt or discomfort. This theory is especially relevant in understanding how societies deal with distant suffering, such as war, poverty, and environmental crises, which are often viewed as being outside the immediate sphere of responsibility.

Moral disengagement occurs when individuals or groups reframe harmful actions in ways that diminish their moral significance. Some of the key mechanisms Bandura identified include:

- Moral justification: Recasting harmful actions as serving a greater good.
- Euphemistic labeling: Using language that downplays the severity of an action.
- Displacement of responsibility: Shifting blame onto authority figures or external factors.
- Dehumanization: Viewing victims of harm as less than fully human, thereby reducing empathy.

In the context of global suffering, moral disengagement can manifest when societies distance themselves from the suffering of others by justifying inaction, downplaying the severity of the crises, or perceiving the victims as fundamentally

different or less deserving of help. For instance, wars and humanitarian disasters happening in faraway regions are often dismissed or ignored by the general public in more affluent societies. People may convince themselves that these issues are too complex to solve, that they are not personally responsible, or that the suffering of distant populations is somehow inevitable or deserved.

For teenagers, who are increasingly aware of these global issues through social media and news outlets, this societal disengagement can lead to cognitive dissonance—the psychological discomfort that arises when their personal values (such as empathy and justice) clash with the moral disengagement they witness in society. Teenagers are often taught to value compassion and fairness, yet they see the widespread apathy or indifference toward global suffering among adults, governments, and institutions. This creates a disconnect between their moral ideals and the reality of societal inaction, leading to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and emotional distress.

As teenagers observe this disengagement, they may begin to internalize it, adopting the same justifications that allow society to look away from distant suffering. For example, they might begin to believe that global problems are too large to address or that individual actions won't make a difference. This internalization of moral disengagement can lead to a sense of moral confusion and, ultimately, contribute to emotional distress, including depression and anxiety. When teenagers feel that their personal values are at odds with the world around them, they may experience a deep sense of alienation and hopelessness.

Moreover, this disengagement can undermine teenagers' sense of agency. When society collectively disengages from moral responsibility, it sends a message that individual efforts to address global suffering are futile. This reinforces feelings of powerlessness among young people, who may already feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of global issues. The result is not only moral disillusionment but also a growing sense of existential anxiety—the fear that the world is fundamentally indifferent or unjust, and that meaningful action is impossible.

Jung's Shadow and the Collective Unconscious

Carl Jung's concept of the shadow and the collective unconscious offers a powerful lens through which to understand how repressed awareness of global

suffering might contribute to personal psychological issues, including depression and anxiety. According to Jung, the collective unconscious is the part of the unconscious mind that is shared by all humans, containing universal experiences, symbols, and archetypes that transcend individual cultures or personal experiences. Within the collective unconscious, Jung identified the shadow as the aspect of the psyche that consists of repressed or denied elements of the self, particularly those aspects that are morally, socially, or emotionally unacceptable to the individual or society.

In Jung's framework, when individuals or societies repress certain realities—such as the suffering of others—these repressed elements do not simply disappear; instead, they reside in the shadow, where they remain unacknowledged and unresolved. Over time, the shadow exerts influence on the individual or collective psyche, often manifesting in negative or destructive ways. In the context of global suffering, societal disengagement from the suffering of distant populations represents a collective repression. The refusal to acknowledge or confront these moral challenges creates a collective shadow, filled with the unacknowledged pain and injustice of the world.

For teenagers, who are particularly sensitive to the moral and emotional contradictions they observe in society, the collective repression of global suffering can lead to internal conflict. On one hand, they may be taught to value empathy, fairness, and social justice; on the other hand, they see that society frequently ignores or downplays the suffering of others. This creates a form of moral dissonance, where teenagers are left struggling to reconcile their values with the behavior of the world around them.

The repressed awareness of this suffering, embedded in the collective shadow, often finds its way back into the personal psyche in the form of psychological symptoms. Jung believed that unresolved elements of the shadow would eventually manifest in individuals through dreams, anxiety, depression, and destructive behavior. For teenagers, who are exposed to global suffering but are often powerless to address it, the repressed awareness of this suffering may contribute to feelings of guilt, sadness, or despair. These emotions, unprocessed and unacknowledged, can lead to depression, as the shadow exerts its influence on the conscious mind.

In addition, Jung's theory suggests that when individuals or societies fail to confront the shadow, they may project it onto others. In the context of global suffering, this projection can take the form of dehumanizing those who suffer, viewing them as fundamentally different or "other." This dehumanization is a defense mechanism that allows societies to distance themselves from the moral responsibility of addressing suffering. For teenagers, witnessing this projection can deepen their sense of moral confusion and alienation. They may struggle to understand why the world seems to ignore or devalue the lives of certain populations, leading to existential despair and a loss of faith in the moral integrity of society.

Jung believed that in order to achieve psychological wholeness, individuals and societies must confront the shadow—acknowledging and integrating the repressed elements of the psyche rather than denying or projecting them. For modern teenagers, this might mean finding ways to engage with global suffering in meaningful and constructive ways, rather than internalizing the moral disengagement they see in society. By confronting the shadow, teenagers can begin to resolve the cognitive dissonance they experience, finding ways to align their values with their actions and developing a deeper sense of moral integrity.

The Intersection of Moral Disengagement and the Shadow

Both Bandura's theory of moral disengagement and Jung's concept of the shadow highlight the psychological consequences of repressing moral awareness and failing to act in the face of suffering. When societies disengage from the moral responsibility of addressing global crises, teenagers are left to navigate the emotional and moral fallout of this disengagement. They may internalize the cognitive justifications for inaction or repress their awareness of suffering, leading to emotional distress, including depression and anxiety.

The intersection of these two theories suggests that moral disengagement is not simply a social or intellectual process—it also has deep psychological implications. As teenagers witness society's refusal to confront global suffering, they may experience a sense of moral estrangement, where their values are at odds with the world around them. This estrangement contributes to a psychological split, where the repressed awareness of suffering resides in the shadow, manifesting in personal psychological issues such as depression.

To mitigate these effects, teenagers need constructive outlets for engaging with global suffering, whether through activism, community service, or creative expression. By confronting the shadow and resisting the mechanisms of moral disengagement, they can begin to resolve the cognitive dissonance and emotional distress that arise from witnessing suffering without meaningful engagement. In doing so, they can develop a stronger sense of agency, moral integrity, and psychological resilience, which can help counter the rising rates of depression and anxiety in today's youth.

Conclusion

Bandura's theory of moral disengagement and Jung's concept of the shadow both offer valuable insights into how societies and individuals cope with global suffering. When societies disengage from moral responsibility, teenagers are left to reconcile their personal values with the cognitive justifications they observe, leading to emotional distress. Similarly, Jung's idea of the shadow suggests that repressed awareness of suffering eventually manifests in personal psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety. To address these challenges, it is crucial to provide teenagers with meaningful ways to engage with the world's suffering and to confront the shadow of moral disengagement, helping them find purpose, integrity, and psychological well-being in a world marked by global crises.

6. Existential Alienation in the Age of Technology

Social Media and Isolation

In the digital era, social media has become an integral part of teenagers' lives, providing unprecedented access to information, connections, and communication. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat offer a constant stream of content, ranging from personal interactions to updates on global events. While social media has enabled teenagers to be more connected to each other and to the world at large, this hyperconnectivity paradoxically leads to increasing social isolation.

One of the central issues with social media is that while it offers virtual connections, it often lacks the depth and substance of face-to-face interactions, leaving teenagers feeling emotionally unfulfilled. The nature of online interactions

is often shallow, driven by likes, comments, and shares rather than meaningful dialogue. As a result, teenagers may engage in frequent digital communication but still experience a profound sense of loneliness and alienation. They may have hundreds or even thousands of "friends" or followers online, but these relationships are often superficial, failing to provide the emotional support or intimacy that real-life connections can offer.

This phenomenon contributes to what some psychologists call "social loneliness"—a state where individuals are surrounded by others but feel disconnected or isolated on a deeper, emotional level. For teenagers, this digital isolation can be particularly damaging during a stage of life where they are seeking to establish their identities and form close relationships. Instead of finding genuine connections, they may become lost in a sea of fleeting interactions, leaving them feeling even more disconnected from others and, ultimately, from themselves.

One particularly harmful aspect of social media usage is the prevalence of "doomscrolling"—the compulsive consumption of negative or distressing news. Teenagers frequently encounter distressing content, including updates on wars, natural disasters, political conflicts, and human rights abuses, as they scroll through their feeds. This exposure to global suffering without meaningful engagement or action can lead to feelings of helplessness and emotional numbness. Doomscrolling creates a cycle where teenagers continually expose themselves to negative news, deepening their sense of despair while reinforcing their powerlessness to make a difference.

Doomscrolling also contributes to cognitive overload, where the constant influx of distressing information overwhelms the brain’s ability to process and respond to the content meaningfully. Teenagers may find themselves trapped in a state of passive consumption, bombarded by negative images and stories yet unable to take constructive action. This can foster a sense of existential alienation, where teenagers become detached from their sense of agency and feel increasingly estranged from a world that seems chaotic, unjust, and out of their control.

The paradox of social media is that it creates an illusion of connection while simultaneously deepening feelings of isolation. Teenagers are more connected to each other and the world than ever before, yet this hyperconnectivity often lacks

the emotional depth needed to foster genuine human connection and purpose. Instead, they are left feeling alienated from both their immediate social environments and the broader world they observe through the screen. The lack of meaningful, face-to-face engagement, combined with constant exposure to global suffering, contributes to the rising rates of depression, anxiety, and existential despair among teenagers.

The Fragmentation of Values

Alongside the isolating effects of social media, modern society is also characterized by a fragmentation of traditional values, further contributing to teenagers' existential alienation. Historically, many people found a sense of purpose and meaning through deeply rooted systems of values, including family, religion, community, and cultural traditions. These institutions provided clear moral frameworks, social support, and a sense of belonging that helped individuals navigate the uncertainties of life.

However, in the modern world, many of these traditional sources of meaning have become fractured or weakened. Families are often dispersed due to geographic mobility, and many teenagers may grow up in fragmented or nontraditional family structures that lack the cohesion or stability once provided by extended families or tight-knit communities. As families become more dispersed or disconnected, teenagers may lose the sense of identity, belonging, and support that comes from being part of a close familial unit. This absence of a strong family foundation can contribute to feelings of alienation and disorientation as teenagers struggle to find their place in the world.

Similarly, religion, which has historically served as a primary source of meaning and moral guidance, has seen a decline in many parts of the world, particularly among younger generations. While some teenagers still find spiritual fulfillment through religious practices, many are growing up in a secularized culture where traditional religious beliefs have been replaced by more individualistic or consumer-driven values. The weakening of religious frameworks can leave teenagers without clear moral anchors or existential guidance, exacerbating their feelings of purposelessness and confusion. Without the moral and existential structures that religion once provided, teenagers may feel that they must

navigate the complexities of life on their own, without a clear sense of direction or purpose.

The fragmentation of community is another significant factor contributing to teenagers' existential alienation. In the past, communities—whether defined by geography, culture, or shared values—provided a sense of belonging and collective purpose. Today, however, communities are increasingly fractured, both by geographic dispersion and by the rise of digital communities, which are often less cohesive or supportive than physical, face-to-face interactions. Teenagers may participate in online communities that revolve around shared interests or ideologies, but these virtual spaces often lack the emotional depth and social cohesion of traditional, in-person communities.

The erosion of these traditional sources of meaning leaves teenagers without clear paths to finding purpose in their lives. In a world where family, religion, and community are no longer central to the construction of identity, teenagers are often left to forge their own sense of meaning without the guidance or support these institutions once provided. This can lead to a profound sense of existential angst—a feeling of disorientation, confusion, and anxiety that arises from the absence of clear moral or existential frameworks.

Moreover, modern society often emphasizes individual achievement and material success as the primary measures of worth and fulfillment. Teenagers are encouraged to excel academically, pursue career success, and achieve personal goals, but these pursuits are often disconnected from deeper sources of meaning. The focus on external validation—whether through grades, social media likes, or professional accomplishments—leaves teenagers with a sense of emptiness, as they struggle to find genuine fulfillment in a culture that prioritizes status and achievement over purpose and connection.

This fragmentation of values contributes to the existential alienation that many teenagers experience today. Without the clear guidance of family, religion, or community, they are left to navigate a world that often seems disconnected, fragmented, and morally ambiguous. The pressure to succeed in an individualistic and materialistic culture only deepens their sense of alienation, as they struggle to find lasting meaning in pursuits that feel disconnected from their deeper desires for connection, purpose, and belonging.

Conclusion

In the age of technology, teenagers are grappling with a unique form of existential alienation that stems from the paradox of social media and the fragmentation of traditional values. While social media connects them to the world in unprecedented ways, it also deepens their sense of isolation by promoting superficial interactions and exposing them to relentless streams of global suffering through doomscrolling. At the same time, the breakdown of traditional sources of meaning—family, religion, and community—leaves teenagers without clear paths to finding purpose and fulfillment in life.

This combination of hyperconnectivity and fragmentation creates a psychological environment where teenagers are more aware of the world's problems yet feel more isolated and powerless to address them. The result is rising levels of depression, anxiety, and existential despair, as teenagers struggle to find meaning in a world that seems increasingly chaotic, disconnected, and morally ambiguous. To address this existential alienation, it is crucial to help teenagers find meaningful ways to engage with the world around them, whether through deepening their relationships, engaging in community service, or finding personal purpose in creative or spiritual pursuits.

7. Overcoming Existential Dread: Creating Meaning in a Chaotic World

The overwhelming sense of existential dread that many teenagers experience in the face of global suffering, uncertainty, and societal fragmentation can feel paralyzing. However, existential psychology offers a pathway for overcoming this dread by focusing on the creation of meaning in life. Both Viktor Frankl and Rollo May provide valuable insights and practical strategies for how young people can find and create meaning, even in a world that often seems chaotic and indifferent.

Frankl’s Will to Meaning

At the core of Viktor Frankl’s existential philosophy is the idea that humans are driven by a fundamental "will to meaning"—the intrinsic desire to find purpose in life, especially in the face of suffering. Frankl believed that meaning can be found in all aspects of life, even in situations of immense hardship and adversity. For

teenagers who feel overwhelmed by global crises, Frankl's philosophy offers a way to transform feelings of powerlessness into meaningful engagement with the world.

Frankl emphasized that meaning is not something that can be passively discovered but must be actively created. For teenagers, this means taking steps to engage with the world in ways that align with their values and contribute to something larger than themselves. Despite the global suffering they witness, teenagers can find personal meaning in various forms of action. Here are some practical strategies based on Frankl's philosophy:

1. Community Service: One of the most direct ways to create meaning in life is by helping others. Even if teenagers feel powerless to address large-scale global issues, they can make a significant impact in their local communities. Volunteering at food banks, tutoring younger students, or participating in environmental cleanup projects are ways for teenagers to contribute to the well-being of others, which in turn gives their own lives purpose. These acts of service allow teenagers to transform their awareness of suffering into tangible, positive action that benefits those around them.
2. Activism: For teenagers who are passionate about social justice, activism can be a powerful way to create meaning. Whether advocating for climate action, racial equality, or human rights, teenagers can channel their feelings of frustration and helplessness into collective action. Participating in peaceful protests, organizing awareness campaigns, or using social media platforms to raise awareness about causes they care about can help them feel that they are contributing to positive change. Activism gives teenagers the opportunity to connect with others who share their values, providing both a sense of community and purpose.
3. Creative Expression: For many teenagers, finding meaning comes through creative outlets, such as writing, painting, music, or other forms of artistic expression. Creativity allows individuals to explore and express their emotions, struggles, and desires in ways that transcend everyday experiences. By engaging in creative pursuits, teenagers can process their feelings about the world's suffering while also creating something unique and meaningful. Creative expression provides an opportunity for self-

reflection and personal growth, helping teenagers to define their identities and values in a chaotic world.

4. Meaning through Relationships: Frankl believed that meaning can be found through relationships and love. For teenagers, developing deep, authentic connections with friends, family, or mentors can provide a sense of purpose and belonging. These relationships offer emotional support and help counter feelings of isolation and alienation. By nurturing relationships that are built on trust, empathy, and mutual respect, teenagers can find meaning in shared experiences and acts of love.
5. Finding Meaning in Small Actions: Even when large-scale problems seem unsolvable, teenagers can still find meaning in small, everyday actions. Being kind to others, showing compassion to a friend in need, or even working diligently toward personal goals can create a sense of purpose. Frankl emphasized that meaning can be found in the smallest moments, and for teenagers, this means recognizing the value in the present and the immediate rather than focusing solely on distant or overwhelming problems.

Frankl's approach encourages teenagers to focus on what they can control, rather than what they cannot. By engaging in purposeful actions, they can cultivate a sense of agency and hope, even in a world filled with suffering.

Rollo May's Courage to Create

Rollo May's existential philosophy adds another layer to the process of overcoming existential dread by emphasizing the importance of courage in creating meaning. May argued that life's inherent uncertainties and challenges naturally give rise to anxiety, but this anxiety should not be feared—it should be embraced as a call to action. He distinguished between normal anxiety, which arises from the challenges of taking responsibility and making choices, and neurotic anxiety, which occurs when people avoid these challenges and feel paralyzed by fear.

For teenagers facing existential dread, May's concept of the courage to create offers an antidote to feelings of helplessness. He believed that individuals must accept the responsibility of living authentically and creating meaning, even in the

face of overwhelming challenges. This requires the courage to confront uncertainty and the freedom to make choices that align with one's values and aspirations.

Here are some practical strategies, based on May's philosophy, for how teenagers can cultivate the courage to create meaning in their lives:

1. Embrace Freedom and Responsibility: May emphasized that each person has the freedom to shape their own life, but with that freedom comes responsibility. For teenagers, this means recognizing that while they cannot control everything that happens in the world, they can control how they respond to it. Taking responsibility for their own choices—whether it's choosing to engage in activism, create art, or build relationships—gives them a sense of autonomy and purpose. By embracing this freedom, teenagers can transform feelings of helplessness into opportunities for growth and self-empowerment.
2. Authentic Action as an Antidote to Dread: May believed that authentic action is the key to overcoming existential dread. This means acting in accordance with one's true values and beliefs, rather than simply conforming to societal expectations or avoiding challenges. For teenagers, this might involve pursuing a passion or interest that reflects their core identity, even if it goes against the grain of what others expect. Authentic action provides a sense of meaning and combats the paralysis that often accompanies existential dread.
3. Confront Uncertainty: One of the central tenets of May's philosophy is that life's uncertainty is unavoidable, but it can also be transformative. Teenagers often feel anxious about the future, unsure of what their role will be in a world full of problems. Rather than avoiding this uncertainty, May encouraged individuals to confront it head-on and use it as a catalyst for creativity. Teenagers can take risks, try new things, and explore different possibilities, understanding that growth and meaning come from the willingness to face the unknown.
4. Creative Acts as Meaningful Resistance: For May, creativity was a powerful tool for resisting feelings of meaninglessness. Whether through art, writing, music, or innovative problem-solving, creative acts allow individuals to

assert their unique existence in the world. For teenagers, engaging in creative projects provides an opportunity to channel their existential anxieties into something tangible and meaningful. Creativity becomes a form of self-expression and a way to assert control over their lives, even when the world feels chaotic.

5. Developing Resilience through Courage: May argued that courage is not the absence of fear but the ability to act despite fear. Teenagers who experience existential dread may feel overwhelmed by the state of the world, but they can cultivate resilience by learning to accept and navigate their fears. By taking courageous steps toward creating meaning—whether through small acts of kindness or large-scale activism—teenagers can build their capacity to face future challenges with confidence and purpose.
6. Freedom to Fail: May also believed that the act of creating meaning requires a willingness to fail. Not every action will lead to success, and not every creative endeavor will change the world. However, the process of trying, failing, and learning is essential to personal growth and the creation of meaning. For teenagers, this means embracing the idea that failure is a part of life and that it should be seen as an opportunity for growth rather than a reason to retreat into existential despair.

Conclusion

Both Viktor Frankl and Rollo May offer practical frameworks for how teenagers can overcome existential dread and create meaning in a chaotic world. Frankl's emphasis on the will to meaning provides actionable strategies for finding purpose through community service, activism, creative expression, and relationships. These acts of meaning-making help teenagers feel connected to something larger than themselves, transforming their awareness of global suffering into opportunities for personal growth and contribution.

Rollo May's focus on the courage to create reminds teenagers that the process of creating meaning requires bravery and a willingness to confront life's uncertainties. By embracing their freedom and taking responsibility for their choices, teenagers can overcome feelings of helplessness and transform existential anxiety into creative action. Whether through small personal achievements or larger societal contributions, the courage to create allows

teenagers to live authentically and find purpose in a world that often feels indifferent or overwhelming.

In the end, both Frankl and May remind us that meaning is not something we find passively—it is something we must actively create. For teenagers grappling with existential dread, the path to overcoming these feelings lies in engaging with the world, embracing the challenges of life, and cultivating the courage to create meaning in their own unique ways. Through this process, they can transform despair into hope and helplessness into purposeful action.

8. Implications for Mental Health Interventions

The rise of depression and anxiety among teenagers is increasingly linked to feelings of powerlessness, alienation, and detachment from global issues and the broader meaning in life. Traditional therapeutic approaches, while valuable, may not always address the deep existential concerns that many teenagers face in today's world. Integrating the principles of existential psychology into mental health interventions can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to addressing these feelings of despair, offering young people the tools to find meaning and purpose, even in the face of global suffering and uncertainty.

Therapeutic Approaches

Existential psychology offers a framework that focuses on the individual's search for meaning, their confrontation with freedom and responsibility, and their ability to face existential anxieties such as suffering, death, and the uncertainty of life. Incorporating these ideas into therapeutic interventions for teenagers can help address the root causes of their psychological distress, which often stem from feelings of existential isolation and powerlessness in the face of overwhelming global crises.

1. Existential Therapy: Existential therapy is a client-centered approach that helps individuals explore their thoughts and feelings around life's deeper questions, such as purpose, freedom, and mortality. For teenagers, this can be a valuable space to process their feelings of helplessness regarding global suffering and explore their sense of detachment from meaningful engagement with the world.

In an existential therapeutic setting, therapists can help teenagers:

- Explore their values and beliefs: By reflecting on what they care about and what gives their life purpose, teenagers can begin to navigate their existential angst and find ways to live authentically.
- Confront their fears: Whether it's anxiety about the future, their role in society, or global suffering, existential therapy encourages teenagers to face these fears rather than avoid them, offering pathways to understanding and accepting uncertainty as a natural part of life.
- Embrace personal freedom and responsibility: Adolescents often feel overwhelmed by the lack of control they have over global events, but existential therapy can help them realize that while they may not control the world, they do have the power to shape their response to it. By recognizing their freedom to choose and their responsibility for their own actions, teenagers can cultivate a sense of agency.

2. Logotherapy: Viktor Frankl's logotherapy is another therapeutic approach that can be particularly effective for teenagers struggling with depression and anxiety related to existential concerns. Logotherapy focuses on the search for meaning as a central motivational force in an individual's life. For teenagers who feel detached from purpose, helping them discover or create meaning in their lives can significantly reduce feelings of despair and isolation.
    - Finding meaning in adversity: One of the key tenets of logotherapy is the belief that meaning can be found in every situation, even in the face of suffering. For teenagers overwhelmed by the magnitude of global suffering, logotherapy offers a way to reframe their struggles and transform their sense of powerlessness into a search for personal meaning. This might involve recognizing the value in personal challenges, finding meaning in relationships, or engaging in small but significant acts of kindness.
    - Techniques of paradoxical intention: A method used in logotherapy, paradoxical intention involves encouraging individuals to face their

fears directly by purposefully imagining the worst outcomes. For example, a teenager who is anxious about global crises might be asked to imagine scenarios that highlight their sense of helplessness, then explore how these fears can be reframed or acted upon constructively. By directly addressing their anxiety, teenagers may feel empowered to take proactive steps rather than feeling paralyzed by their fear.

3. Meaning-Centered Therapy: A modern offshoot of logotherapy, meaning-centered therapy helps individuals identify their core values, beliefs, and passions, and then create meaning-driven goals. For teenagers, this approach can be transformative because it enables them to shift their focus from the overwhelming scope of global suffering to areas where they can make tangible contributions to their communities or personal lives.

This therapy can be structured to:

- Identify sources of meaning: Helping teenagers reflect on the areas of life that bring them joy, fulfillment, or a sense of contribution—whether through relationships, creativity, or altruism—can counteract feelings of detachment and alienation.
- Set meaningful goals: Therapists can guide teenagers in setting attainable, purpose-driven goals that align with their values. These goals might involve participating in community service, building relationships, or pursuing creative projects, all of which can provide a sense of purpose and agency.

4. Existential Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): While Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is often seen as a solution-focused approach, incorporating existential principles into CBT can deepen its impact for teenagers facing existential crises. Existential CBT focuses not just on changing negative thought patterns but on exploring underlying existential concerns, such as fear of meaninglessness, lack of purpose, or anxiety about the future.

- Reframing thought patterns: For teenagers feeling overwhelmed by the state of the world, existential CBT can help them reframe their

negative thoughts by focusing on areas of life where they have control and can make meaningful contributions.

- Mindfulness and acceptance: Techniques such as mindfulness and acceptance can help teenagers live in the present moment rather than being consumed by future uncertainties. This allows them to find moments of meaning and connection even in their daily lives.

Engaging in Meaningful Action

A critical aspect of addressing existential distress in teenagers is helping them engage in meaningful action. While global suffering may feel insurmountable, guiding teenagers to take small, purposeful steps in their own communities or lives can significantly reduce feelings of helplessness and existential anxiety. Existential psychology emphasizes that even small, deliberate actions can bring a sense of purpose and fulfillment, allowing individuals to feel more connected to the world around them.

1. Volunteerism and Community Engagement: One of the most effective ways to alleviate existential distress is through community service or volunteerism. Teenagers who feel powerless in the face of global suffering can find a sense of purpose and agency by contributing to causes within their local communities. Whether it's volunteering at a local shelter, participating in environmental cleanups, or helping with a community project, these activities allow teenagers to witness the impact of their efforts firsthand. By directly contributing to the well-being of others, teenagers can counteract feelings of alienation and detachment.
2. Activism and Advocacy: For teenagers passionate about social justice, environmental sustainability, or human rights, engaging in activism can provide an outlet for their concerns. Activism allows young people to channel their anxiety and frustration about global issues into constructive action. This can take many forms, such as joining advocacy groups, organizing fundraisers or awareness campaigns, or even using social media platforms to raise awareness about causes they care about. By being part of a collective movement, teenagers can experience a sense of solidarity and shared purpose, which helps reduce feelings of isolation and helplessness.

3. Creative Expression as a Form of Meaningful Action: Creative pursuits such as writing, art, music, or filmmaking offer teenagers another avenue for finding meaning. Through creative expression, teenagers can process their feelings about the world in a way that feels personal and impactful. Art and storytelling provide ways to communicate their inner world and engage with larger social issues while still maintaining a sense of autonomy over their expression. This process can be cathartic, offering a way to turn existential dread into tangible creations that give their lives meaning and direction.
4. Peer-Led Projects and Mentorship: Another approach is to encourage teenagers to take leadership roles in peer-led projects or to seek out mentorship from individuals who can guide them in meaningful endeavors. Whether it's organizing a community project with friends or getting involved in youth mentorship programs, these activities foster connection, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Working on projects that align with their values can help teenagers develop confidence in their ability to contribute to society, thus reducing feelings of existential despair.
5. Building Relationships: Existential psychology highlights the importance of authentic relationships as a source of meaning. Encouraging teenagers to focus on deepening their personal relationships can help alleviate feelings of detachment. By fostering meaningful connections with friends, family, and mentors, teenagers can find emotional support and a sense of belonging, which counteracts the alienation they may feel from global suffering. Positive relationships also remind teenagers that they are not alone in their struggles and that shared experiences can be a powerful source of meaning.

Conclusion

Integrating existential psychology into mental health interventions for teenagers provides a path for addressing the deep sense of powerlessness, alienation, and detachment many young people feel in today's world. By focusing on therapeutic approaches that emphasize the search for meaning and the courage to confront life's uncertainties, teenagers can develop resilience in the face of global suffering and existential dread. In addition, encouraging them to engage in meaningful

action—whether through community service, activism, creative expression, or relationship-building—helps teenagers cultivate a sense of agency and purpose in a chaotic world. These interventions offer teenagers a way to navigate their existential crises while finding hope and fulfillment in their ability to make a difference, no matter how small their actions may seem.

9. Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

Throughout this paper, we have explored how modern society's detachment from meaningful action, particularly in response to global suffering, plays a critical role in the rise of existential crises among teenagers. Adolescents today are exposed to unprecedented levels of information about the world's crises—wars, environmental destruction, social injustice, and humanitarian disasters—largely through the lens of social media and the internet. However, despite this heightened awareness, they often feel powerless to take action or influence these large-scale issues, leading to profound feelings of helplessness, alienation, and existential dread.

The theoretical frameworks of Viktor Frankl and Rollo May have provided valuable insight into these existential dilemmas. Frankl's concept of the existential vacuum explains how teenagers, when unable to find or create meaning in their lives, can experience depression and anxiety. Rollo May's focus on the courage to create highlights how embracing personal freedom and responsibility can empower teenagers to navigate existential anxiety by taking authentic action in the world.

We have also discussed how moral disengagement (as described by Albert Bandura) and repressed awareness of global suffering (through Carl Jung's concept of the shadow) contribute to teenagers' internal psychological conflicts. These mechanisms of disengagement—both personal and societal—further exacerbate their sense of detachment from meaningful action and deepen their emotional and existential struggles.

Finally, we examined how technology, especially social media, paradoxically fosters hyperconnectivity while isolating teenagers from meaningful engagement

and authentic relationships. The fragmentation of traditional values, such as family, religion, and community, has left teenagers without clear moral and existential frameworks, intensifying their sense of alienation in an increasingly chaotic and complex world.

Call to Action

Addressing these existential crises in teenagers requires a collective effort from parents, educators, and mental health professionals. It is crucial that we create environments where young people feel supported in their search for meaning and purpose and provide them with the tools to navigate their feelings of existential anxiety.

1. Parents: Parents play a vital role in helping their children find personal meaning. Encouraging open conversations about global issues, feelings of hopelessness, and the pursuit of meaning can help teenagers process their emotions in healthy ways. Parents should also foster opportunities for teenagers to engage in meaningful action, whether through volunteerism, activism, or creative projects. By modeling authentic engagement with the world, parents can inspire teenagers to take responsibility for their choices and actions, providing a sense of purpose in their everyday lives.
2. Educators: Schools and educational institutions are uniquely positioned to offer structured opportunities for teenagers to explore their values and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Educators can integrate service-learning programs that encourage students to connect classroom lessons with real-world issues, enabling them to see the impact of their actions on a smaller scale. In addition, fostering critical thinking and discussions about moral, philosophical, and existential questions can help students grapple with the larger challenges they face. By creating inclusive environments where students feel valued for their perspectives, educators can help teenagers develop a deeper sense of agency and belonging.
3. Mental Health Professionals: Mental health professionals, including therapists, counselors, and psychologists, can draw on existential psychology to address teenagers' existential crises. By incorporating logotherapy, existential therapy, and meaning-centered therapy, therapists can help teenagers find purpose in their lives despite feelings of

powerlessness. Offering teenagers safe spaces to explore their existential concerns and encouraging them to engage in meaningful action can reduce feelings of detachment and improve their overall mental health. Additionally, professionals should prioritize resilience-building strategies that teach teenagers how to cope with uncertainty, take responsibility for their actions, and create meaning even in the face of adversity.

Hope for the Future

Despite the overwhelming challenges teenagers face today, there is hope for their ability to overcome existential despair and lead meaningful lives. The path to overcoming feelings of helplessness and alienation lies in their ability to embrace their freedom and responsibility to create meaning, no matter how chaotic the world around them may seem. Small, meaningful actions, such as contributing to local communities, engaging in creative projects, or building authentic relationships, have the power to transform teenagers' sense of purpose.

By focusing on what they can control, rather than what they cannot, teenagers can experience a sense of empowerment and hope. These small steps—whether volunteering at a food bank, participating in environmental activism, or creating art that reflects their inner struggles—can lead to profound psychological and emotional growth. In the process, they begin to reclaim their agency and realize that they are not passive observers of a chaotic world, but active participants capable of making a difference, even in seemingly small ways.

As parents, educators, and mental health professionals work together to support teenagers in finding authentic engagement with the world, we can cultivate a generation that not only copes with existential challenges but thrives in the face of them. Through meaningful action, teenagers can reconnect with their values, find purpose in their lives, and ultimately overcome the existential dread that so often accompanies their awareness of global suffering.

In conclusion, the challenges that teenagers face today are undeniable, but they also present opportunities for personal growth and meaning creation. By helping teenagers recognize their freedom to choose and responsibility to act, we can empower them to transform their existential anxieties into purposeful living. In this way, small, meaningful actions can have a profound impact not only on teenagers' mental health but also on the broader world they inhabit, creating

ripple effects of positive change in both their lives and the communities they touch.

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This reference section provides foundational sources on existential psychology, moral disengagement, and the impacts of technology on teenagers' mental health, supporting the arguments presented in the paper.